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ABSTRACT

This paper explores technical questions of ethnographic study and uses as an example an actual episode observing college students and the subsequent decisions and steps taken to produce a written account. In particular, the paper seeks to address the question of researcher subjectivity by examining some issues relating to the practice of incorporating a field worker's voice into research reports. The first section of the paper outlines some views on the field worker's stance taken from the fields of mainstream sociology and anthropology and then supplements these with ideas from a feminist orientation. Subsequently a first-person by "impressionist" account is offered of an evening spent at a fraternity house by a participant-observer at a large, all-house party. The account includes commentary and interpretation informed in part by the author's own biography. A following section describes how the field notes were produced and transcribed into readable text. It also discusses his personal feelings about writing the material and sharing personal background material in the text, choice of tense, and how he inserted himself in the account while trying to minimize interrupting the story's flow. Final thoughts address how a story such as this is enriched by including autobiographical elements. Contains 19 references. (JB)

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TELLING AN IMPRESSIONIST TALE: ENHANCING OUR KNOWLEDGE OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Doubletree Hotel, Tucson, Arizona, November 10-13, 1994. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Introduction

Reports of research utilizing ethnographic models and methods are often in the form of realist tales (Van Maanen, 1988) which attempt to represent the native's point of view and omit the lived experience and voice of the fieldworker. I argue that the conventional ethnographic approach of situating the fieldworker as detached and unbiased tends to leave out a rich source of information and insight and is not unlike "a colorblind man reporting on a sunset" (Margaret Mead, 1949, cited in Dumont, 1978, p. 13). In fieldwork reports, I believe that there is much to be learned about the lives of others by acknowledging the researcher's presence both in the field and in the final text which is produced.

The dual purposes of this paper are to (1) address the topic of researcher subjectivity by examining some issues relating to the practice of incorporating a fieldworker's voice into research reports and to (2) offer an exemplar of a narrative taken from my own work which focuses on the use of alcohol by undergraduate students, specifically drinking in a college fraternity. First, I shall outline some views on the fieldworker's stance taken from the fields of mainstream sociology and anthropology (Denzin, 1989; Dumont, 1978; Geertz, 1988; Moffatt, 1989; Pratt, 1986; Rabinow, 1977; Van Maanen, 1988) and then supplement those perspectives with ideas from a feminist orientation (Krieger, 1991). Subsequently, I'll offer a first-person "impressionist" account (Van Maanen, 1988) of an evening spent at a fraternity house as a participant-observer at a large, all-house party—which includes commentary and interpretation informed, in part, by my biography. Finally, I reflect on some of the decisions made and steps taken in producing this written account and offer my opinions of how a narrative such as this may be enriched by including autobiographical elements in the text.

The Author in the Ethnographic Text

The reports of field studies which I find the most pleasurable and informative are those with the author revealed as an embodied voice in the midst of the action—rather than as a distant, detached and impersonal voice. When a writer is attempting to communicate another culture to me, I find that it rings most true when I can sense the personal experience of the ethnographer having been there. When the writer's *humanity* is evident—by revealing feelings, personal thoughts, expressed vulnerability, tentative hunches, and so forth—I connect more fully with the text and generally find it an easier matter to project myself into the setting and vicariously experience that foreign culture. Fortunately, I do not find myself alone in expressing such preferences. In this section, I briefly review the matter of the author's placement in the text.

Ethnographic genres

John Van Maanen (1988) describes different types of ethnographic writing and, in so doing, addresses the issue of the author's relationship to, and placement in, the text. The first such type described is the "realist tale," which attempts to authenticate a version of a culture by narrating in a "dispassionate third-person voice" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 45). Typically, the fieldworker goes to the field, does the job of data collection, and in the finished written work, reports objectively on what the members of the culture have said, thought and done. As readers we must take on "good faith" what the fieldworker reports as "true"—that is, we must assume that any

competent observer in the same situation would experience and report pretty much what is written. Dumont (1978, p. 6-7), commenting on this style of writing, notes that "the publications of anthropologists have long consisted of 'objective' monographs in which their presence in the field have been bracketed out, as if the 'empathic involvement' has been repressed for the sake of a hoped-for 'detachment'."

Realist tales, as models for what many believe ethnographic reports should be, also tend to focus on rather ordinary aspects of everyday life and portray what is generally understood to be the stance of the members of the culture under study, the so-called "native's point of view." As Van Maanen (1988) explains, "extensive, closely edited quotations characterize realist tales, conveying to readers that the views put forward are not those of the fieldworker but are rather authentic and representative remarks transcribed straight from the horse's mouth" (p. 49). Finally, ethnographers writing in the realist vein tend to present their accounts in a "just the facts, ma'am" fashion and, in general, have "the final word on how the culture is to be interpreted and presented" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 51). An example of a realist tale from the college student literature is Michael Moffatt's (1989) *Coming of Age in New Jersey*, an account of an anthropology professor's study of college students in a Rutgers residence hall. The following passage from this work demonstrates the dispassionate realism of the account, but interestingly, also includes a sentence from his personal experience:

> The sophomores apparently took Pete at his word about the toughness of the new drinking regulations, but they also immediately began scheming about ways to circumvent them. The very next evening, some residents of Hasbrouck Fourth from the year before—a group of seniors with a big house on Henry Street, a half-mile from the campus—threw a big off-campus party, a "three-kegger." Dan and his friends saw to it that everyone from Hasbrouck Fourth was invited. Some of the new freshmen drank so much that they had to be helped back to the dorm afterward, the sophomores reported contentedly later. Many students also drank all the harder in their rooms. Perhaps a dozen had little refrigerators for cold beer, and there was at least one private bar among the students on the floor. Many of the men and some of the women possessed fake identification cards for use in public places and exchanged information about which off-campus bars were easiest which nights of the week. One evening I nursed a beer at a favorite college hangout and had the genuine pleasure of being "carded" myself, at the age of forty-one, while four underage friends put away drinks with names like Zombie and Red Death and Kamikaze. (pp. 84-85)

Some writers, however, prefer to go beyond the straight (third person, objective) reporting offered in a realist tale. Mary Pratt (1986, p. 31) informs us that personal narrative does have its place and, despite being labeled by some as "self-indulgent, trivial, or heretical. . .[it] is [also] a conventional component of ethnographies"(p. 31). One form of personal narrative in ethnography is labeled the "confessional tale" by Van Maanen (1988) who notes that such reports are characterized by "their highly personalized styles" (p. 73) and, not uncommonly, by self absorption on the part of the author. Authors writing in the confessionist genre may be attempting to do a variety of things through their prose, such as demystifying the whole fieldwork process, relating elements of their personal relationships with the natives, or describing how certain hardships in the field were endured or overcome (Van Maanen, 1988). In anthropological works, Pratt (1986) suggests that they "turn up almost invariably in introductions or first chapters, where opening narratives commonly recount the writer's arrival at the field site, for instance, the initial reception by the inhabitants, the slow agonizing process of learning the language and overcoming rejection, [or] the anguish and loss at leaving" (p. 31). In a confessional, the details that matter most

are associated with the author's experience, such as "emotional reactions, new ways of seeing things, new things to see, and various mundane but unexpected occurrences that spark insight" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 76).

Confessional tales, in some ways, take up where realist ones leave off, and ultimately expose the subjectivity of the author. The confessional blurs the lines between the native's culture and the fieldworker's lived experience in that culture (Van Maanen, 1988). Fieldwork moves from being primarily a descriptive task to one that is more wholly interpretive (Agar, 1986; Van Maanen, 1988). This interpretive process, notes Van Maanen (1988, p. 93), is a hermeneutic one, and "begins with the explicit examination of one's own preconceptions, biases, and motives, moving forward in a dialectical fashion toward understanding by way of continuous dialogue between the interpreter and the interpreted."

William Foote Whyte's classic sociological realist tale *Street Corner Society* was first published in 1943 without the confessional elements it now contains in its highly self-disclosing appendices. In Appendix A of the 1981 edition, Whyte explains that an account of his life in "Cornerville" is now offered to help the reader understand the data analysis process since he had become "convinced that the actual evolution of research ideas does not take place in accord with the formal statements we read on research methods. The ideas grow up in part out of our immersion in the data and out of the whole process of living" (p. 280). Whyte's description of his "first outing with Doc," the key informant of his study, is an excellent example of the confessional tale in ethnographic writing:

> We met one evening at the Norton Street House and set out from there to a gambling place a couple of blocks away. I followed Doc anxiously down the long, dark hallway at the back of the tenement building. I was not worried about the possibility of a police raid. I was thinking about how I would fit in and be accepted. The door opened into a small kitchen almost bare of furnishings and with the paint peeling off the walls. As soon as we went in the door, I took off my hat and began looking around for a place to hang it. There was no place. I looked around, and here I learned my first lesson in participant observation in Cornerville: Don't take off your hat in the house—at least not when you are among men. It may be permissible, but certainly not required, to take off your hat when women are around. . .There was talk about gambling, horse races, sex, and other matters. Mostly I just listened and tried to act friendly and interested. We had wine and coffee with anisette in it, with the fellows chipping in to pay for the refreshments. (Doc would not let me pay my share on this first occasion.) As Doc had predicted, no one asked me about myself , but he told me later that, when I went to the toilet, there was an excited burst of conversation in Italian and that he had to assure them that I was not a G-man. (p. 298)

Finally, the last category in Van Maanen's (1988) typology of ethnographies is given the label "impressionist." He calls this a "subgenre" because it is most often found within larger works that would be more aptly characterized as realist or confessional. In much the same manner as confessionals, these stories are written in the first person and often depict events which happened in the field where the writer is pictured as an active participant. As Van Maanen states, "impressionist tales present the doing of the fieldwork rather than the doer or the done. . .[and are] a representational means of cracking open the culture and the fieldworker's way of knowing it so that both can be jointly examined. . .[by keeping] both subject and object in constant view" (p. 102).

Impressionist tales also involve the practice of "dramatic recall," which is the form an impressionist tale takes when

> [e]vents are recounted roughly in the order in which they are said to have occurred and carry with them all the odds and ends that are associated with the remembered events. The idea is to draw the audience into an unfamiliar story and allow it, as far as possible, to see, hear, and feel as the fieldworker saw, heard, and felt. (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 103)

Van Maanen (1988) explains that in some cases this dramatic recall is done by writing in the present tense to attempt a "'you are there' feel" (p. 105) to the text and "can stand alone with or without elaborate framing devices or extensive commentary. . .[allowing] the fieldworker-author to slip out of the story to make an analytic point or two" (p. 103). These tales, though, rely on their story-like characteristics and tend to keep the action going in order to keep the reader actively involved. In essence, "the audience is asked to relive the tale with the fieldworker" (p. 103).

An example of an impressionist tale, published as an independent work, is Paul Rabinow's (1977) *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*. The book jacket of *Reflections* indicates that Rabinow has "previously published a more standard ethnographic study about Morocco," indicating that, first, a conventional, realist work was produced and only later was it considered acceptable to publish this highly personalized account.

In chapter 1 Rabinow details some his first "impressions" of this new land:

> The next morning, my fourth in Morocco, I had coffee and bread in the courtyard of l'Oliveraie. It must have been lovely in earlier years. There was an enclosed garden with a grillwork from which vines once grew, there were metal tables which once shined, and there was Ahmed, the waiter, impeccably groomed, who might have served (or so I imagined) tables of French families preparing for the tasks of the day ahead. I was alone. It was already getting hot. Ahmed brought me down the brown earthenware coffee pot with a polite, pseudo-French bow, refused my overtures, and moving swiftly, left.
>
> How ethnographic. In Morocco only several days and already I was set up in a hotel, an obvious remnant of colonialism, was having coffee in a garden, and had little to do but start "my" fieldwork. Actually, it as not exactly clear to me what that meant, except that I supposed that I would wander around Sefrou a bit. After all, now that I was in the field, everything was fieldwork. (p. 11)

Texts as biography

Some authors have noted that the ethnographic experience is linked closely to the researcher's biography. Kimball and Watson (1972, p. 7) state that "personal involvement is both deep and inevitable" in the production of an ethnographic work. Further, in discussing the issue of how "present" an author is allowed to be in an anthropological text, Geertz (1988, p. 9) maintains that the issue "has haunted ethnography from very early on" because of an epistemological debate that has focused on how to prevent the "objective facts" from being tainted by one's subjectivity. In admitting that "ethnographies tend to look at least as much like romances as they do like lab reports," Geertz (1988, p. 8) has devoted an entire book to the "author function." Through an examination the works of four anthropologists (Lévi-Strauss, Evans-Pritchard, Malinowski and Benedict), Geertz discusses the difficulty and the contradictions inherent in "constructing texts ostensibly scientific out of experiences broadly biographical" (p. 10). While he advises caution in regarding ethnography from a strictly literary perspective, he observes that the "capacity to persuade readers...that what they are reading is an authentic account by someone

personally acquainted with how life proceeds in some place, at some time, among some group, is [what] ethnography seeks to do…" (pp. 143).

Expanding further on the notion that the doing of ethnography is part of the researcher's biography, Denzin (1989) enjoins symbolic interactionism with a variety of other traditions such as naturalistic inquiry and the case study approach in a framework that he labels "interpretive interactionism." In speaking to the relationship of the researcher with both subject matter and text within this framework, Denzin (1989) offers his belief that:

> Interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher. The events and troubles that are written about are ones the writer has already experienced or witnessed firsthand. As David Sudnow (1978, p. 154) argues, the individual's perspective is "definitionally critical for establishing the what" and, I add, the "how" of problematic social experience. The task is to produce "richly detailed" descriptions and accounts of such experiences (Sudnow, 1978, p. 154). In this project, the writer has "no body but himself to consult" (Sudnow, 1978, p. 154). Important consequences follow from this position. Only you can write your experiences. No one else can write them for you. No one else can write them better than you can. What you write is important. (p. 12)

Denzin (1989) further claims that "the focus of [interpretive interactionism] is on those life experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their experiences" (p. 10). Because interpretive interactionism's goal is to connect the researched's world of lived experience and the world of the reader, one of the ways that that can be most effectively accomplished is by researchers turning "to their own world's of experience" (p. 10) as material to study. Presumably, the most effective way of communicating and, hence, connecting these two worlds is by studying what one knows best. It seems apparent that Denzin's view of interpretive inquiry not only allows for researcher subjectivity, it *demands* it in order for the reader to "connect" with the phenomenon under study. The mediating factor in the text is the biography of the researcher.

For example, in discussing his own work on the experience of the alcoholic, Denzin (1989) reveals that:

> In my study of the alcoholic self, I went to the places where alcoholics gathered. I presented myself as a person interested in A.A. I have alcoholic family members. I formed friendships with recovering alcoholics and their spouses and children. I also became friends with alcoholism counselors and other treatment personnel in treatment centers. I was able to listen to alcoholics talking in their homes, in public places where they drank, in hospital emergency rooms where they went for medical treatment, in detoxification centers, in treatment centers, and in A.A. meetings. (p. 55)

Social science as art

In this section I discuss the work of Susan Krieger as an exemplar of an individual who is at the forefront of the conversation in feminist social science research about personalizing one's writing. She advises that "we ought to acknowledge, more honestly than we do, the extent to which our studies are reflections of our inner lives" (Krieger, 1991, p. 1). Not believing that science is "hard, objective, standard, dispassionate, . . .about measurement, clear-cut models of behavior, or procedures" but rather *is* "soft, subjective, idiosyncratic, ambivalent, conflicted, about the inner life, and about experiences that cannot be measured, tested or fully shared" (p. 2), Krieger perceives her work rather akin to an art form. She takes issue with what she calls "traditional styles

of expression within social science" (p. 2)—that is, those (that I will label as the) conventional, cold, distant, detached, dispassionate realist accounts discussed above.

Krieger (1991) asserts that:

> At one time I could write a study and then write separately about how, and why, I came to do it. I no longer feel I can proceed in that way. I now need to speak more directly about my involvement with any subject I study. Writing about others, or about a social process, without reference to the self has come to feel alienating and untrue to me. Writing personally has become a way that I can feel I am doing social science in a responsible manner (p. 2).

She claims that in constructing, conducting and writing up a study, what we do and report is *not just* about the other, it is also a statement about ourselves as human beings. It is not possible to offer theories about "them" without those theories—"of how 'they' act and what 'they' are like"—also being about "who we are, how we act, and what we are like" (p. 5).

Krieger appears to be little embarrassed in disclosing that she has spent a great deal of time in therapy. This is something she and I share (for me, both as a client and a therapist) and, perhaps, can explain some of the connection I feel to her and to her views of social science. Not surprisingly, this part of her life's journey seems to have a decided effect on her and her approach to social science. Speaking in terms that at times sound decidedly psychoanalytic in orientation, Krieger shares that "understanding others actually requires us to project a great deal of ourselves onto others, and onto the world at large" (p. 5). She contends that social scientists in general

> tend to believe that the world outside of self is the world of primary importance. The external world is the world our studies ought to be about. We may concede that the external world is known through us, and that a considerable amount of empathy, identification, or observer involvement is required for social knowledge, but it is usually not said that all, or most, of what we know is ourselves. I am saying that I feel it is. For me, it makes more sense to see the world as self than to imagine that we can know a free-standing external reality, or to say that what we know is a largely unweighted interaction between self and other. (p. 5)

Hence, Krieger believes that the outer world, or our "external reality," is inseparable from what we already know based on our lives and experience—our inner reality. In fact, the knowledge of the external world is only a small part of what our total knowledge can be—what we ever really know, in essence, is self. For me, it seems that what Krieger may be espousing here is a version of a Socratic view of the world. The three most important words for Socrates were: *Man, know thyself* (Small, 1982). By acknowledging that knowing self is where we start in our experience of the universe, doesn't all other knowledge follow from there?

Inevitably, as an inquirer I run certain risks when approaching my writing in such a subjective manner—a point that Krieger does not neglect to emphasize. A personalized approach to science is not the norm in academia and I am vulnerable in that no longer can I hide as a scientist behind a dispassionate third-person text and lay claim to an objectivity that I may seek to project to the reader. The judgments that come—especially when they are negative—may just as well be of me, the researcher, as of my work, for as Krieger (1991, p. 33) notes:

"[p]ersonal expressions in social science often leave one feeling vulnerable. To avoid vulnerability, one often seeks to protect the self by limiting the extent to which one discloses personal information."

Of course, it is this very first-person vulnerability to which I am attracted as a reader of ethnographic texts. And it is this aspect of the communication that motivates me to want to write in this way. As a writer, I wish to connect to my readers in the same fashion that, as a reader, I have felt connected to some writers. Like Krieger, I feel more honest when I produce an account that exposes my biases, my weaknesses, my prejudices, my total lived experience; that is, my *self*. I think that the reader of an account so produced is more able to judge the truth of that which is communicated, for as Krieger (1991) notes: "[w]hen we write in distant and impersonal ways, we underestimate the extent to which a distanced stance can alienate us from ourselves and each other, and make us less able to speak the truth of our experiences as we move farther from them" (p. 33).

Krieger (1991) uses the fields of painting, psychotherapy and pottery-making as metaphors for the experience of social science. In the field of painting, for example, Krieger offers a partial analysis of the life, work and worldview of the artist Georgia O'Keeffe. For O'Keeffe, posits Krieger, "subjectivity was all encompassing, the only thing of real value, the source of all creative intelligence" (p. 81). For those of us who have learned that personal knowledge is subjective and not to be trusted, this viewpoint may be difficult to accept. But Krieger is inclined to view her beliefs about science as parallel to O'Keeffe's regarding art, namely that truth is "individual and internal" (p. 81). In O'Keeffe's work, she sought "to discover not the nature of the 'other,' but to find what she wants to say from within, and determine how to say it. . .the self is the world and to deny the self is to deny the world" (p. 82). While these ideas may seem remote and barely connected to the practice of social science, Krieger demonstrates their relevance when she states:

> I think O'Keeffe is important to me in part because most of the social scientific community, and most of the larger world that I know, tells me to accommodate, to reflect the other, compromise, forget myself, pretend, agree, use the words that people generally use, seek for objectivity, or for what many might think is true. O'Keeffe is a special figure in my inner landscape because I hear her advising me to pay attention to an inner struggle. . .[and] *however odd it may sound to assert that social science is about what can be found in the self, that is what I wish to say above all.* I wish to do this in part because the nature of my effort feels that way to me: I do not struggle to get the outside world to speak, but to find my own version, my own reality. (p. 83, emphasis added)

Summary

This section has discussed the perspectives of several authors on the critical issues of authorship and authority. All agree that first-person accounts and displays of researcher subjectivity have traditionally been avoided in social science, and that such subjectivity is often viewed not only with suspicion but, not uncommonly, with contempt. Despite the conventional view which shuns subjectivity, though, I am increasingly led to believe that the voice of the researcher in the final text is not only appropriate but desirable. If one accepts the viewpoints of theorists such as Denzin (1989) and Krieger (1991), we *ought* to be acknowledging biographical nature of ethnography—and a researcher's subjectivity—as necessary and vital elements of the inquiry process itself. While I am not suggesting that an author's subjectivity be flaunted, I am willing, at very least, to put my subjectivity out

there for all to see and evaluate. As Krieger (1991) so eloquently notes: "We must teach ourselves that the individual view need not be apologized for and that we have a right to be part of what we know" (p. 55).

The preceding discussion lays the foundation for the personalized fieldwork account that follows. This narrative is offered as an "impressionist tale" of my experience during one evening I spent visiting a fraternity house for one of their traditional, annual events: a party called the "INS Luau."[1] I initially engaged in this fieldwork project to understand the role of alcohol in undergraduate life, specifically in all-male fraternities, though most of the data gathered from the four participating groups have been through the use of individual and small group interviews. Two previous accounts of this material have been published elsewhere (Arnold & Kuh, 1992; Kuh & Arnold, 1993), primarily as "realist tales."[2]

Much of the data analysis from this project has tended to focus on the importance of the socialization aspects of fraternity life in modeling and influencing alcohol-related behavior. The party described below was studied because is a significant event during a pledge's initial exposure to life in INS in that it is the first event at which they are allowed to drink alcohol in the presence of active members. It is also important in terms of my study of alcohol and this fraternity's socialization process because it is the sole event to which I was allowed physical access during the INS pledgeship period. All other descriptions I have of alcohol use during the pledges' first ten weeks in this group are second-hand accounts offered to me during interviews. This event is the closest I ever got to INS as a group and I offer it here as an illustration of how including some autobiographical references (from the researcher) in the narrative may lead to enhancing reader understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The INS Luau

The all-house party known as the "INS Luau" is the first event during Iota Nu Sigma pledgeship where pledges are allowed to consume alcohol with the permission, and in full view, of the active members. The Luau is held every fall semester about four to six weeks into the school year, and has, as is obvious from the name, a Hawaiian Island theme. Pledges spend a lot of their free time preparing the house—and the parking lot behind the house—for the event. As one pledge told me, "for a week we had to shovel sand and get the house decorated." An active member said that "four to five big truckloads" of sand are brought in for the event; in fact, about 150 tons are imported into the INS parking lot and fraternity house. All told, I found the Luau an ambitious, impressive and expensive undertaking.

In order to understand my take on a drinking occasion such as this fraternity event, a short outline of my history seems appropriate. My first experience with alcohol occurred at about age 16 after which I embarked on a long and prolific drinking career when entering college at age 18. In my life I have contended with addictions to both alcohol and Valium and been arrested for driving under the influence, have participated in an out-patient alcohol treatment program and countless alcoholics anonymous meetings, and currently have over eleven years of sobriety as a recovering alcoholic. Although not a college "Greek," for more than five years I was a professional

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[1]This is a chronological reconstruction of my experience at the 1992 event; both "INS" (for Iota Nu Sigma) and "Luau" are pseudonyms. Throughout the narrative, other, similar word substitutions have been made in order to protect the identities of the group and certain individuals.

[2]I have also written a first-person account of my experience at an INS "Rush Weekend," which will appear in my dissertation (Arnold, forthcoming).

photographer specializing in "special events photography" (primarily fraternity and sorority parties) on the campus of a large public university in the Pacific Northwest. In addition, I have a masters degree in counseling and have studied in the field of addictions. Given this personal background, I offer my impressions of the INS Luau.

On the appointed evening, I arrived at INS about 5:30 PM and approached the house just as a few members were arriving with their dates. I saw that the guys were dressed in grass skirts and the girls in bikini tops and shorts or skirts. The house was generally pretty quiet, though, and I didn't come close enough to anybody for them to greet me. I didn't encounter any security guards at this early hour, nor was I challenged by any member; I walked right in one of the front doors. I immediately walked downstairs to see if anyone was eating in the dining room; my information was that the first class—the freshmen—would start about now. No one was down here yet, however. I did see that food was set up at one end near the kitchen, but apparently nobody was quite ready this early. One significant feature of this event is a roasted pig, and I observed that it had been cooked and was ready to serve. The INSs hire a whole crew of non-members to help out with this part of the party: "we have somebody turn it [the pig] for us," I was told. Since it takes about twelve hours to roast the pig, the crew charged with this task had slept at the house the previous night and started work at about 4:00 AM.

The stage for the night's upcoming event was quite a sight. In the basement of the house, for a few minutes, I sat down to take in the scene from an old wooden bench (which reminded me of a church pew that may have been left out in the weather for a few years) that had been imported into the Maple Room—the room right outside the dining area. The doors to my right are open, revealing an outdoor patio area—with a concrete floor and a few pieces of outdoor furniture. Behind me the pool table had been boarded over with plywood and a large, multicolored, hand-printed sign was on the wall behind it that said "INS LUAU." Standing by the pool table was a large floor fan, idle at this time. As I sat facing the dining room doors I observed that the whole floor was covered with a layer of sand a few inches deep. To my left was a small, empty, wading pool, about five feet in diameter and eighteen inches high, and another one was in the far right corner where, I realized, their big screen TV is usually placed (it had been removed and was now locked in the computer room). There are large rocks placed around each of the pools and leaves and branches hang from the ceiling tiles and the doors. There are a few green plants scattered about. To my left is a makeshift lean-to: a sloping wooden roof, coming out from high on the wall, covered with straw and supported by two upright poles. There are some wooden dining room chairs scattered about the room as well as a couple of black wrought-iron chairs, apparently brought in from the patio. The Maple Hallway (the computer room, now off limits, and restrooms are accessible from here), which leads from the Maple Room to a stairway, is also covered with sand and there is another small wading pool, this one containing water, rocks and long green leaves. Plants line the side of the hall and more branches and leaves are hung from the ceiling.

Trying not to get too much sand in my shoes, I traveled up the stairs past the Maple Hallway and outside to the sand-covered parking lot. As I exited the rear door of the house, I saw members of the band unloading their equipment and setting it up in the corner to my right, under the window of a lounge area—from which I watched events for a time later on in the evening. The band's area is set apart by bales of straw, two bales high at points. I sat down on one of the bales and looked around, noting that there were very few people around other than me and the band members who were preparing for their 8:00 PM start time.

There is a fence along one side of the parking lot, screening the house from the academic building next door. The back of the parking lot has been blocked off with several, suspended patched-together bed sheets. On the sheets are large hand-printed letters, approximately four feet high, which proclaim "INS LUAU." A large painted head of an island "native" is also displayed to the right of the word LUAU. There is a bone through the nose of the figure. More sheets block off the driveway behind me and to my left where the band is unloading their truck. These sheets display another "native" in full-figure, also with a bone through his nose. At the top of the sheets are printed IWANALEIU in letters about eight to twelve inches high, and below that (to the right of the figure) are the numbers "92" about five feet high. There are lanterns on bamboo poles that line the perimeter of the parking-lot-turned-party-area. There is a small pool built in the far right corner under what I know is the disguised basketball hoop, next to the painted head of the native. It is surrounded by rocks and is fed by a waterfall coming from the top of the basketball hoop, which is camouflaged with branches and leaves. In the far left corner is what looks like a large teepee, but I see no entrance. There are also some palm trees in the area of the teepee. A straw roof is attached to the fence, held up by four corner poles plus one pole in the center. Suddenly, the rumble of many feet on the stairway behind me break the silence and a few members rushed down the steps and out of the house exiting the front door. As they ran down the stairs they chanted (repeatedly and in unison):
"aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa...I-N-S!"

I turned around and re-entered the house. As I did so, one member I interviewed last year has spotted me. He smiles broadly, looks briefly at his date, then yells my name quite loudly. With this encounter I finally have started to relax and feel at home. As I roamed the halls, I was stuck by everyone's appearance. All the males appear to be dressed in grass skirts with a variety of athletic and other shorts underneath, and have body paint on their bare chests, backs and legs. The skirts are typically straw-colored or green. The paint is applied in a variety of designs and sayings. One member who I recognize as a sophomore has "FUCK OFF FROGS" written across his back, an obvious reference to his opinion of pledges.[3]

I saw one member cross a hallway wearing a straw skirt and a headband—also popular attire—and kicking a large, white plastic bone from room to room. Most of the women I have encountered are wearing bikini tops and shorts with fabric "wrap arounds" (my term) around their mid-sections. Most, or many, of the outfits are made of matching, colorful fabric. I suspect these were produced especially for this event. I wondered about the formal or informal communication network that passes along the expectations for attire to the women present, especially first-time attendees.

While strolling the hallways, I was invited into a room containing two INS juniors and their dates. On the floor, strategically placed in the middle of the room was a 22-quart clear plastic container containing a mixture of Hawaiian punch and rum. In the syrupy-looking, pink liquid floats a white Pizza Hut plastic cup for dipping and dispensing. There appears to be about a gallon or so in the container when I enter, and all the room's occupants have their large plastic cups filled. It is explained to me that these cups change color from year to year. This year's color is pinkish, more magenta, and has a palm tree on it with the words INS LUAU is large letters with "iwanaleiu" in smaller, scripted letters underneath.

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[3]Pledges are commonly referred to as "frogs," a term with a highly negative connotation.

While making small talk, they point out that on the stereo is "Bob Marley: Legend, his greatest hits." One member eventually looks at his watch and says, "We've got fifteen minutes before we eat. Let's do shots before we go down." One of them reaches high on a shelf and plucks down a full fifth of Ron Rico Silver Label rum, and while pointing out to me that drinking rum is consistent with the INS LUAU theme, he grabs a handful of ice and deposits it in another plastic Pizza Hut cup, and then pours some of the rum in over the ice. After a minute or so he pours some of the chilled rum into a shot glass which the other member chugs down. Although they are invited, the females decline to participate in this ritual. The guys take turns and match each other shot for shot. At one point, one says, "How many have we had now?" to which the second replies, "I've had three and you've had two. I'm ahead of you, as usual." The first member responds by offering an amused, though disgusted look—and a snort. They carefully take turns pouring out the shot for the other person and with some degree of seriousness, explain to me, "You never pour your own shot. That's the sign of an alcoholic."

Although these members are likely not true alcoholics and I'm sure it's possible to explain their actions in a variety of ways, this behavior seems very alcoholic-like to me. As a "wet" alcoholic for many years, I view the scene as quite familiar. The practice of making drinking a contest of sorts ("I've had three and you've had two. I'm ahead of you, as usual."), drinking multiple straight shots in a very short period of time, and using language and behavior that minimizes their behavior ("You never pour your own shot. That's the sign of an alcoholic."), are all indicators to me that these men could be headed for alcohol problems. Alcoholics are famous for finding ways to engage in denial. They offer rationalizations such as: "I never touch a drop before dinner;" "I only drink beer;" "I only drink on weekends;" or, in this case, "only alcoholics pour their own shots." All of these statements are typical of people with drinking problems who are actively denying the seriousness of their issues with alcohol. Further, by directing their comments at me, they seem to be engaging in some kind of attempt at impression management. They want to give me some kind of "spin" on what I'm observing so as not get the wrong impression of them. I'm not here to judge these individual fraternity members, however. Their behavior is not at all atypical of what I have observed over the years at several hundred fraternity parties, or what will go on in most of the rooms of this house tonight.

When it was time for this room's occupants to go down to the dining room, I thanked them for their hospitality and wandered down to the parking lot to see what's going on. It's about 6:30. The first thing I noticed is that one of the members out here, a sophomore who I interviewed last year, has somewhat different attire on. He is in shorts, a very colorful, contemporary tye-dye t-shirt and a billowing lei around his neck. There are about fifteen or twenty couples milling around: some wading in the pool, others just standing, drinking and talking—and some taking pictures of each other. Given my long history with these kinds of events as a party photographer, I wondered if there would be a professional photographer around tonight. From one of the windows up above the sounds of a Jimmy Buffett album entertained the entire neighborhood.

After just a few minutes I decided it was time to check out the dining room area again. The class of juniors started filtering in. I recognize my hosts from a few minutes ago as they enter, and observe that the guys appear to be a trifle wobbly and may be getting glassy-eyed. They noisily call out to one another in recognition as they decide where they're going to sit. After they've decided on a spot (they leave their drink cups—mostly the

magenta-colored party cups, but one woman is drinking a wine cooler—to mark their place), they get into line for the food, still loudly calling out to one another and talking all the while.

Planning to observe for awhile, I have chosen to sit on top of a table that doesn't have any chairs at it—right to the side of the tables where everyone will be eating. One of the members approaches me. Knowing that I am doing research on alcohol in this group, he reminds me that the LUAU is a "very atypical event" for this group; a "once-a-year event," I am advised.

I am struck with the observation that he is minimizing, in some fashion, the behavior that takes place here, this time labeling it as "atypical." It is almost as if there is a need by this member to deny the importance of the event, even though this Luau happens in pretty much the same way every year, and I know it is very much a part of "who and what this group is."

As the members and their dates find their way back to the tables with food in hand and are being seated, I noticed that one woman has the word "Booga" printed in black letters on both of her arms. Although I ask her later about the way she's decorated her body, and especially about the word "booga," what I get is a non-answer answer: "I'm an anthropology major," she tells me when we meet upstairs in the hallway and have a short discussion about academics and careers. (Apparently that response was supposed to make sense to me. I merely nodded and moved on.) The meal consists of roasted pig meat, fruit salad, and a roll or biscuit. It looks like some individuals also have a barbecue sauce on their plate to add flavor to the meat. A small number of people in the room are smoking cigarettes as they eat, and as one member walks through the room, he too observes this and yells (at no one in particular as far as I can tell), "Hey, no smoking in the dining room." Personally, I appreciated this admonition, but no one pays any attention. I looked around just in time to see another member enter the room carrying a large "bone" and loudly yell, "BOOGA!" Another member then notices me sitting on the table and yells in my direction, "Hey, alcohol guy! What's your name?" I answer. He says, "Is it OK to call you alcohol guy?" I shrug and reply, "It seems to be a pretty popular thing to do." (Which it is. Even for those members that have been interviewed by me, most remember me only as "that guy researching alcohol use," not my name.)

A member from another class comes into the room with his date, is noticed by the juniors, and is greeted with a shout, "Hey! Get the shit out of here! GET OUT! GET OUT!" Some food is then thrown at the couple as they make a hasty retreat from the room. As most everyone eats fairly quickly, the time soon comes when couples get up and leave. As this is happening, several members stand at once in the middle of the room and sing the college's Alma Mater, and then take up a drinking song, though I cannot make out many of the words.

I wish I could have made out the words to this song, but is was sung in a very rowdy, loud manner and I could only vaguely understand that it was, indeed, about drinking. To this point I have not been surprised by the drinking, and particularly out-of-control drinking, that seems to be an important element of this night's activities.

A small food fight breaks out. (I later learn they could have been fined for this as seniors are the only members officially sanctioned to throw food tonight.) A number of women run for cover, as do I. One member yells, "Hey, where's the alcohol man?" and then sees me, indicating that his intent is to throw food at me. "Get him," he says. I stand my ground and say only, "Please don't!" Secretly, however, I am pleased at this sign of inclusion.

The place is a mess after the juniors leave. They have not bussed their tables and have left the room in general disarray for the next group. The room is left littered with the remnants of the meal as well as the food fight: used

paper plates, plastic utensils, cups, bottles, wet napkins, and food are all over the table and some on the floor. The next group is the freshman, though, so this makes some sense to me, as I assume they mean for the pledges to clean it up. (The group has departed from the traditional freshman-sophomore-junior-senior order for eating this year. The order, tonight, dictated by the freshman athletic schedule, is sophomore-junior-freshman-senior.)

One member walked though with his date when just a few people remained in the room. Another member asks him, "Have you had anything to drink tonight?" To which he shrugs, shakes his head, offers a weak smile and replies (apologetically, I interpret), "I'm not. . .I'll talk to you later." It appears through this interaction that drinking is so much normal and expected this evening that a member is embarrassed when admitting that he is choosing not to drink. To the drinking member's credit, however, he doesn't seem to apply any pressure at this juncture. Another member walks in and yells, "Where's my bone? Where's my bone?" I point to a place underneath a table close to me and say, "Over here."

I remained where I was for a few minutes while the freshmen prepared to enter. Somebody yelled, "FROGS, YOU'RE NEXT!" and the freshmen started filing in. When they see the mess left on the tables, a few of the first to arrive start to clean. One pledge placed his arm from wrist to elbow along the table's width and physically scraped the debris off and into a waiting garbage can, strategically placed at one end. After all the tables have been superficially cleaned in this manner, the pledges and their dates save their places at the tables, just as the members before them did, with their drink cups, and line up for the food. This is a very big group, which I had learned earlier in the week.[4] It's possible that I'm familiar to at least a few of these guys since I was at one of the rush weekends last year, however nobody in this group speaks to me—or even seems to notice that I'm around. The group is so big that they must take the chairs down from the top of two of the tables that had not yet been used tonight.

A sorority member, who is a date of one of the upperclassmen, found me as I sat watching the pledges, and engaged me in conversation for awhile. I interviewed her some time ago, having met her at one of INS' spring events last year. I recall that she had talked to me about alcohol-related artifacts in fraternity houses to which she responds, "Oh, and you know, it's even worse this year!" After she left, I decided to wander around some more upstairs. I made a mental note to make sure to come back down here in a half hour when the seniors eat, during which time the pledges serenade them. I remembered hearing a description of this ritual from last year's pledges and want to experience it first-hand.

I found myself in one of the second floor hallways (I *think* it's second floor. . .but I don't know which end of the house I'm at. . .I still get confused up here!) when a member put his arm around me, points to the woman next to him and asks, "Now what do you think of *this* cleavage?" The woman gets embarrassed and flustered, blushes somewhat and giggles and turns away from us both. At this point I was at a loss for words. I smiled. I thought to myself, typical male, "there's *lots* of great cleavage around here!," but I remain silent and smiling and keep on walking. I found a spot to sit down for a few minutes, and before I had the time to recover from this last encounter, a sorority woman sits down right next to me so that the two of us are now completely blocking the stairway. As I felt her thigh next to mine, I thought, "Well, what a friendly group we have here tonight!" She isn't

[4]This pledge class started with forty, seven dropped after the first night of pledgeship, then an additional six or seven were picked up through formal rush.

familiar with me or my work so asks me what I'm up to and also what I've found. Another female comes over (they're both from the same sorority, I learn) and listens in. I talk about alcohol and fraternities in real general terms and alcohol use and pledgeship in particular. They nod in agreement as I speak. The girls' dates eventually find us, as do a couple of other partiers. The girls are asked what they're doing and they reply that they're learning about my research. The date of the girl sitting next to me is teased by another member, suggesting that his date left him for me. I look right at him, and though he's not smiling, I offer him a big smile and say, "I'm *sure* you're worried!" One of the newly arrived girls takes a picture of me and the one that is sitting next to me.

The remark about "great cleavage" is one that both amused me *and* made me uncomfortable. While I am totally capable of appreciating the female form, I am not one —anymore—to loudly and publicly objectify it in the manner that the INS member was rather loudly, rudely and crudely doing. And then when one member suggested that I had made off with another member's date, it was again a time for ambivalence. While I was flattered that that could even be verbalized, regarding an attractive woman half my age, I did not want my presence to threaten anyone. It did seem that perhaps we may have had another example of the objectification of females, though, this time as a "possession" that another male could steal.

By this time it's 7:30 and I realized that I had to get downstairs for the seniors are about to eat. As I walked in a member on the other side of the room hollers out, to no one in particular, "I'M SO FUCKED UP I'M GOING TO BE HUNGOVER FOR THREE DAYS!" I sat down at the same table I'd been at before and the president of the house finds me, shakes my hand and says, "Well, what do you think?" I notice his attire for the evening, including the rather nice touch of a black wig, and tell him that he "looks great." He indicates that he's not interested in *that* but more an impression of the event so far. He indicates that this party is costing about five to six thousand dollars—about half of what last year's did. Last year, of course, they had hot tubs. Before we can really pursue this conversation any further, another senior interrupts and warns that I really shouldn't be sitting where I'm sitting; "You'll be sorry!" he says. As several members and their dates have already warned me of the dangers involved in observing the pledges serenade the seniors, I ask where the safest place is. I am directed to the corner of the room by the doors opening to the Maple Room, where the pledges will both enter and exit—and where they will be far away from me when they sing their song. I am right by an open window, underneath where the band has set up—and they start playing, almost directly into my left ear! (A sound check, I guess, for they're not supposed to be starting up for real yet.) One member, a sophomore, stands next to me to observe the scene also. On his back is painted: ROOM DAMAGE, INC. Other members come in and out of the doors, some of whom nod or speak to me in recognition—some calling me by name and some referring to me, still, as "alcohol man."

Finally, one of the seniors stands up and yells to everyone present, "WE'VE GOT SOME FUCKING FROGS THAT ARE GOING TO SING TO US!" The pledges file in, as a group without their dates, and stand along the edge of the tables where the seniors are seated, exactly where I had been minutes earlier. The group seems quite disorganized. Some near the center have their arms around one another, but mostly the whole group is just stumbling around. Eventually, after a few minutes, most of them seem to be facing the same direction —toward the seniors. When they start singing, I, for one, am unable to understand any of the words (which had happened earlier, too, with the drinking song). But the instant that they start singing, the seniors start throwing food at them—they are pelted with all sorts of material from the plates and tables, which rapidly escalates into

whole cups of punch being thrown in their direction. Most of the accumulation of solid and liquid propellants (some of which are thrown very hard) do strike a target. Through the barrage the pledges keep singing, apparently determined to finish their song, but for self-protection some of the group starts to disperse. When they have finished, they rapidly file out of the room, passing right next to me, though I have taken cover behind some of the other observers. Most are smiling though the hail of food and liquid and even I am finally hit, with some of the punch finding its way onto my shirt.

This is the only time during the night that I get to see the pledge class together. Someplace in the house, presumably, they have their own special drinking place, but during this night I do not discover it. This is the only group in the house that has not been introduced to me and does not know what I am about, and so I tended to define my mission for the evening as experiencing the "whole event," not just taking it from a pledge's perspective. When the pledges do get together for their assigned ritual of serenading the senior class, it is merely an opportunity for them to be degraded—a time during even this special occasion when they are reminded that they do not have the full privileges of membership in this group. They really are, still, just "fucking frogs."

By the time things have quieted down in the dining room it is 8:00, so I headed outside once again where the band is prepared to start. It's dark outside now and all the lanterns have been lit. I realized that these are not electric lanterns, but rather real fire—kerosene I would guess. Very shortly there are probably at least a hundred people or so outside here, many talking in small groups, a lot listening to the band. The lead singer announces, "SOME U2!" A member yells back, "FUCKIN' AYE!" I note that most everyone has a plastic cup in their hand; many of the members are also carrying pitchers of punch with them as they stand or walk around outside.

To a casual observer, I imagine, this may look like an innocent junior-high theme party where everyone is drinking kool-aid. This is definitely not the case. Although it's not possible for me to say for sure, I imagine that most of those plastic cups are filled with more than punch; most contain significant concentrations of alcohol, in one form or another. I don't really think this would be the same event if everyone were sober. My impression is that the males consume more alcohol than the females, but this is only a generalization. Some of the females do consume considerable amounts of alcohol during this evening.

I watched outside for awhile, but I was curious what was happening inside, so I walked upstairs for a look. I came upon a large group of seniors that had apparently headed straight up here after their dinner. They are congregated in a hallway around what must be a 30-gallon plastic garbage can full of punch. The president sees me and says, "Ah, I knew that I'd see you up here." One member states (about the punch), "It's good shit!" and I ask for the recipe.[5] One senior seemed to be in charge of preparing the mixture, the so-called "hairy buffalo," and stated that its composition was the following: "four half gallons of vodka, four half gallons of rum, one-half gallon of Southern Comfort, one-half gallon of Seagram's Seven, another fifth of Southern Comfort, a pint of (what sounds like to me) Rumpliments (described as sort of like peppermint schnapps), one bottle of Boone's Farm County Kwencher, an additional fifth of vodka, and a variety of fruit (chunks), punches and kool-aid." This mixture practically fills this large garbage can. The senior who had given me the recipe winks and tells me that,

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[5]I recall that a pledge interviewed last year did not think of hairy buffalo as such "good shit:" "They bought us alcohol for the Luau. . . ."Hairy Buffalo," [they called it]. . .the most disgusting thing . . .made by the trash can [full consisting of] vodka, Everclear, fruit punch, and fruit pieces. . ."

"It's very easy to drink and everybody loves it. . .it's a real spread-your-legs potion." (He has to repeat this several times before I understand what he's saying. The noise level up here is incredible. And we can't even hear the band! He virtually has to shout this right into my ear.) One member suggests that I take a drink and am offered a cup just about at my lips. I say, "No, thanks." Another *insists* that I take a drink, and a number of members and dates are watching. I was feeling the pressure to consume. Fortunately, I resisted. All that I could think of was that I had over nine years without a drink—and I was damned if I was going to blow that record to please a bunch of wild and crazy undergraduates! My curiosity was high, though, and I was amazed at myself for nearly succumbing to this pressure. One of the females comes by to inform me, "They just do this to get the girls drunk, you know." (She couldn't have heard what the member had told me about the "spread your legs" remark, though; I have to ask her to repeat this to me, too, because of the noise.) When I didn't respond right away after she said this, she looks straight at me and said, "I'm serious." I said, "Oh, I know you are. . . (pause). . . what *does* happen after they get you drunk?" "Nothing," she said, in what sounds to me as an incredibly young and naive voice.

The members here seem to be very proud of the large amounts of alcohol consumed during the event and are pleased to know of my interest in their hairy buffalo concoction. They badly want me to consume some of it, and through I am a recovering alcoholic with many years sobriety to my credit, I am tempted. Why should I succumb to the pressure of this group of college kids? I don't know. Thankfully, I remain in control. I can only imagine that it would be very difficult for any of the party attendees, member, pledge, or date, to maintain total sobriety at this event. I am curious about the female's remark to me, indicating that the alcohol is "to get the girls drunk." Does this make everyone, including the females, less responsible for their actions this evening somehow, given the large volume of alcohol that is consumed?

After that encounter, I went downstairs to the first floor to find some solitude for awhile—and I ran into the president again. He wanted to make sure that I make myself scarce when "the dean" comes by (meaning anyone from student affairs). He was especially worried about what John Martin may do if he is the one that visits the house tonight. He describes Martin as "militant." He indicates that he (the president) has read some of what I've already written on INS rush and pledgeship and believes that anybody could identify this house with just a few pages of reading—indicating to me that he doesn't put it past Martin to take some action against the house on the basis of what I've written—that is, if he's read it. The president especially does not want me visible tonight if Martin comes by—he feels that I would be readily identified and pumped for information. I am told that Martin is an "ex Beta Beta from here" and it doesn't make a lot of sense that he seems to be so gung ho in his pursuit of disciplining fraternities.

This is a curious exchange. If it's discovered I'm there, and I'm studying fraternity drinking, that may mean that this group drinks! Is this right? What a surprise! Is this some other kind of organizational denial being exhibited by the president?

At 8:35 and I went outside again. It was very crowded. I walked over by the pool underneath the basketball hoop. One male and two females walk into the middle of the pond and the male motions for me to come in too. He yells something to me as I shake my head. I can't hear what he's saying over the sound of the band. He kicks some water in my direction and I started to walk away, feeling some of the spray hit the back of my shirt. The

women that were with him run away too, as they squeal and try to not be splashed themselves. Most of the people outside here are talking and drinking, only a handful of couples are doing anything close to what I'd call dancing, though some near the band are watching them and swaying along with the music. The band strikes up the Rolling Stones' "Paint It Black," a song from my undergraduate days and my reality is challenged. *Am I still here, going to college parties? Will this ever end for me?*

While I was back around by the large "92" sign, I noticed that a professional photographer had arrived and set up back here. He has two studio-size strobes set up on poles that illuminate the scene in front of the sign. Several couples and small groups wait in line to get their picture taken. As I approached, I noticed that two members were vying for the photographer's attention; one is the member that has had the large bone with him all night, which he now has stuck between his legs protruding from his crotch and aimed at the rear end of the other member with him. They are both laughing rather uncontrollably as the photographer struggles to fit them, and keep them, in the frame. I think to myself, "Well, I'm still going to undergraduate parties, but I don't have put up with the shit that the photographer at an event like this does."

One the curious things that is happening on this evening is the extreme comfort level that people at this party seem to demonstrate for having me around. I don't feel like I'm intruding at all tonight. A couple that comes over to me and says, "Hey we've got a quote for you!" and wait for me to get my pencil poised above my note card. When I'm ready they say (in unison), "Beer before liquor, never been sicker. Liquor before beer, nothing to fear." Then they give me an alternative last line: in place of "nothing to fear," substitute "you're in the clear." The female half of the couple gives me her name for attribution of the quote, but I state that I don't use any names in my writing. She initially frowns, but they both walk away smiling and rather pleased with themselves.

Another woman with whom I'm not familiar asks me what I'm doing. I give her a very brief explanation, to which she replies, "Well, I was *wondering* who you were—sitting around and writing all the time. You looked so *serious*!" I think to myself that I have *not* been writing all the time: I've been talking so much that I'm hoarse!

I encounter the president *again*—geez, is he following me or what? He wants to make sure that I know about the private security that they've hired for the night and the fact that they've also got a taxi service—so that the members don't have to drive to take their dates home. "We try to be responsible about the way we do things here," he says.

Mostly what I think about this is that "the security" is able to keep uninvited individuals out of the house during the party, and would even be able to keep even "the dean" outside until members have a marginal amount of time to try to hide alcohol should he appear. Additionally, no member or pledge has to perform a security-like function tonight—all are free to participate in the festivities and get as drunk as they want. Not even the possibility of having to drive someone home will stop anyone from drinking; transportation is furnished. No one is in the role of designated driver. While this is "responsible" behavior on the house's part, it also allows for the possibility that no one will remain sober and, further, is simply appropriate risk management practice. No one will get arrested for DUI and no one will get in an accident while drunk. "Responsible" house practice in this case, *could* be viewed as enabling members to drink past individually-responsible limits.

I was sitting on a heating vent in the hallway when I was approached again. Two members come by with their dates, and say, "Here's a quote." "You've got a quote for me?" "Yeah. Fuck ya!" They are smiling and don't

sound nasty, so I wondered what the meaning of that was for them—I wearily realize that perhaps a fully-functioning fieldworker would have tried to engage them in a discussion of the meaning of their comment, but I've been here quite awhile tonight and, well, it just seems like I should be able to let this "fuck ya" go. So I do. I'm tired. And they're drunk.

I arrived at a second floor hallway and encountered one of the crew that roasted the pig. I said to him, as I looked down the length of this relatively deserted space, "How would you describe this hallway?" He paused, then came up with the word, "Trashed." I agreed that this was an excellent characterization. As I looked down the hall I saw flower petals, branches, leaves, and sand literally ground in to the carpet that had been spotless just a few hours ago. I asked myself about how such "responsible" individuals could be so irresponsible to so thoroughly demolish their own property. The phrase "responsible fraternity" seemed an oxymoron while looking down this hallway.

I noticed that on the door to my left is written in (crayon, I think) purple letters: "No Frogs. Stay Out." Even on this night—presumably a break in pledgeship from the usual class distinctions of member and pledge—one room's residents still have to make a point of keeping out "frogs."

A member that I had briefly talked to earlier in the evening comes up to me and asks if I'd like to see the "effects of beer." Before I can intelligently respond, he offers me a demonstration by banging his head against the wall several times, very hard. "I've got a hard fuckin' head," he says.

Downstairs again, I found a spot in a lounge area where I could sit on the window ledge and watch the goings-on in the parking lot. I noticed that the crowd has thinned out some. Some members are running around on the sand, tackling one another and wrestling. The band has introduced a bass guitar solo, which I thought was somewhat unusual. The lead singer comes from the front of the band around to the back, right beneath the window ledge where I am seated. First he takes off his shirt and sweater down to his bare chest (and I think "brrrrrr"), then he puts on a long wig, and puts a shirt back on. He eventually swaggers and staggers back toward his spot at the front of the group, carrying what appears to be a full bottle of Jack Daniels. This is a bottle I readily recognize from my drinking days. He announces a song by The Doors—is he supposed to be doing Jim Morrison? I don't know. There are a number of members and dates sitting on the bales of straw and singing along. "Wow," I thought, these kids know some old tunes! I noticed in the background, out there on the sand, a member and his date dancing groin to groin, slowly swaying along with the music. I noticed some other members dancing along and there's lots of yelling. This band and this singer has got them going! A sophomore member gets on top of a bale and starts dancing alone.

I observed that some of the partiers have covered up with sweatshirts and other forms of heavier clothing than they had on earlier in the evening. Many remain in the same attire, however, and I only attribute this to their youth and blood-alcohol levels—which, judging from their speech and behavior, must be fairly high. I have made my way downstairs and outside, having had enough observing from afar and am feeling ready to get back in the middle of things again. Shortly after I emerged from the house and onto the sand, I am hailed by three members who call me over and lead me to where the photographer is busily snapping pictures. These three members call out to the photographer to get his attention and we quickly set up to get a picture taken of the four of us. I asked them

if they can order one for me when they see the proofs, and one of the females nearby says (who seemed to be taking care of me), "I'll make sure you get one." (I never do.)

The band is apparently playing an entire set of Doors tunes and I keep recognizing the songs from "my era." The lead singer has downed practically the entire bottle of "Jack"—and then I saw him offer a drink from the bottle to one of the members sitting on the straw. The singer, staggering, and by this time with his shirt off, yells out, "INSs, YOU ARE SHIT KICKIN', HARD DRINKIN' MOTHERFUCKERS!" I went over to the member who took a drink from the bottle and asked him, "Is that *real*?" He just shook his head, and said rather blankly, "No. . .it's ice tea."

The band has totally gotten into the act. I don't know if this is something they do at all fraternity parties or if it's a performance especially for INS, but it's effective. The message seems to be that this is a drinking event, and that INS is sucessful at what they're doing tonight: drinking. I can't argue with that.

The band finishes its Doors medley and takes a break. At about 10:25 I have decided to go downstairs to the dining room to check out its condition. I learned during a discussion upstairs a while ago that the place was quite a sight—in much worse shape than when I last saw it. As I walked through the doors from the Maple Room, I immediately saw a member vomiting into a large plastic garbage can on the opposite side of the room. A small group of members and dates are standing not far away, barely paying any attention to him at all. They do, however, intermittently look in that direction and seem amused (they call out to him and are laughing). Then I *really* noticed the room. If the upstairs hallway was trashed, I hardly know what to call *this*! The tables and chairs are covered with food and other stuff that looks like: watermelon, seeds, baked beans, soggy napkins, plastic utensils, squashed grapes, cups, plates, leaves, branches, and sand. That's all I can identify at first glance. All are mixed together in a kind of a caricature of some bad, life-size modern art; it's almost laughable at the "Animal House" image that it brings to mind. All the tables appear to be upright, but many of the chairs are overturned. The walls have been plastered with splotches of garbage here and there. Literally, from end to end, the room appears demolished. (I think: imagine a honkey-tonk, in a TV Western, after a brawl. . .) As I turn to exit I saw a couple cuddling on a couch that's been tucked away in the corner of the room for the night (a piece of furniture from the Maple Room, I guess). I noticed of pair of woman's shoes by the door.

This really *is* more the picture of Animal House rather than a "responsible fraternity." This place is a disaster area. And it seems that the behavior on the part of the member who is throwing up is so expected on an evening like this that it hardly merits attention by anyone. Drinking, and drinking to excess, is what happens here.

I have made it up to the hallway with the garbage can of hairy buffalo in it again. What was once a virtually full garbage can of alcohol-laden punch is now nearly empty. There is a long-handled sponge mop placed in the can and I learn that some members use it to transfer out the last remaining cupsful of the mixture. The mop is simply squeezed out over the partiers' waiting cups. Those standing around here have seen my suspicious looks and I am assured that this was a new mop this evening, not one that had been used before. There are still quite a number of members and dates milling around in the hallway, everyone with a cup in hand, but I can definitely "feel" that the party is losing steam.

As I sat on a step in the middle of one of the second floor hallways, I further noted the colorfulness of this event. The color of the punch, the cups, the tye-dye shirts, the fabric the girls are wearing, the body paint, the

skirts on the guys, the signs, even the garbage in the hallway and in the dining room, are all powerful in their impact on the senses. As I am thinking about this I heard one member yell to another, "HEY! WHERE'S YOUR DATE?" To which the reply was, "Oh, she's been passed out since about nine." Another member yells a few minutes later, "HEY! THE ALCOHOL GUY IS IN A ROOM WITH MY DATE!"

I chuckled and moved on.

My thoughts have turned to calling it a night. Just about everything I could have hoped for tonight has been experienced. I feel really good about the event tonight, especially my inclusion into the normal flow of the evening. I have felt less and less "the outsider" to this secret organization. At this point, however, as I walked down one of the hallways, a member confronts me who does not seem totally in control; he sways a little bit and slurs his words when talking to me. He challenges me on what I'm doing in the house, carrying my note pad and tape recorder. He suggests that I'm only there to "bust them." I have really decided that it's time to leave now, but not before I patiently listen to this member's concerns. I calmly assured him that "busting them" is the furthest thing from my mind, and that if he wants to talk about my project more sometime that I'd be very happy to do that. A sophomore who I interviewed last year watches this exchange and, I think, looks somewhat surprised that I have even been challenged. He nods when I briefly explained myself to the confrontive member. Also going on in this hallway at the same time is a long and serious discussion about a date who is "not feeling well" and "wants to go home." This issue is unresolved during the time I'm in the hall.

I recognize this time of a party well. Things are about at an end, but no one can end it. It's almost as if the last one standing "wins," though the likely prize may be the most horrendous hangover. Some people have passed out, others have become belligerent. Still others may just "want to go home." Many of the females will end up spending the night—and it may happen, despite the protests of earlier in the evening to me, that they engage in sexual activity with their date—even if that isn't what they originally intended. No one really talks to me about this part of a drinking occasion much, it's just sort of "understood." Some members do admit to me that it entails a certain amount of status to a member who has a female stay the night, though not only on INS Luau night, but other occasions as well. Some have talked to me about this regarding their Pledge Party, for example. There are some things in this group that don't get talked about much, especially with an outsider. I suspect some of the information that does get shared with me is because I am male, however, such as some of the eye-winking kinds of comments I get about females' "cleavage" or that they sometimes spend the night.

My last stop of the evening was the room on the second floor called "Room Damage, Inc."—the message I had seen painted on a member earlier in the evening. A couple of the members from this room show me what the place is all about—mainly the destruction that they have done to parts of this room. There are holes in the doors and other evidence of violence against property. What concerns me most about the room, though, is a girl who has some kind of injury, a cut foot I think, and is lying on one of the beds looking quite haggard. During the time I stand talking with the members, she eventually crawls up to the upper portion of a loft to go to sleep. She appears to be reasonably OK, though I think to myself that I'm glad I don't have to deal with her head (hangover) or her foot tomorrow! The Room Damage members describe themselves to me as "six guys out of control." They say they'd be happy to do an interview with me sometime. I take down their phone number and all their names, and then, finally, say "good night."

I started to leave the event behind me as my watch read 11:15. I decided to take in some last images before I go. In the parking lot there's only about ten couples left, although the band is still going strong (they play until midnight). I'm aware that the partiers are in varying stages of sobriety—that is the ones who I can see and are still standing, walking, talking and somewhat functional. Many, by this time, are walking slowly, and some are sluggish enough to be described as just stumbling around. The date of one pledge offers me the unsolicited observation that, "Just because there's a lot of alcohol in my blood stream right now, doesn't mean just anybody's going to have their way with me! If you're a strong-willed individual, you'll be strong when you're wasted away!" I have not idea why she told me this, nor did I try to engage the young lady in further conversation. As she admitted, she was quite intoxicated.

I wouldn't be at all surprised to learn later that this female had ended up staying the night, but I never find out. Somehow, though, I thought that she protested a little too much.

It was really time to call it a night. I exited the same front door from which I had made my initial entrance tonight, nodded to the security guys (Do I talk to them? No. I'm too tired.) and headed down the street for my vehicle.

Reflections on Writing "The INS Luau"

In this section, I return to the discussion from the beginning of this paper—regarding the author's place in an ethnographic text—by exploring stepwise some of the decisions I made along the way in authoring this tale. I begin with a description of how I physically produced the fieldnotes and transcribed them into a readable text. Then, I discuss such matters as: my comfort level with writing in the first person and providing personal background material to the reader; my choice of tense in the narrative; and, how I inserted myself into the tale while trying to minimize interrupting the story's flow. Finally, I offer my opinions of how a story such as this is enriched by including autobiographical elements.

Producing the narrative

During the evening of the INS Luau I carried a stack of small (3x5) index cards, a mechanical pencil, and a tape recorder. The small tape recorder remained unused, for the most part, and was not activated except to record a portion of the drinking song. The tape produced was even less intelligible than the original rendition of that song, so a transcription was impossible. Hence, the entire event was recorded using only the pencil and index cards. However, what the notes look like and the way the narrative reads are quite different. My original notes are mere scratchings on both sides of a series of fifteen cards and likely are intelligible only to me.

Starting the day after the event, I began writing the above narrative using the notes as a guide. I subsequently spent part of each day, for about two weeks immediately after the event, working on the first draft of the narrative. I felt that it was important to me to do the transcription while the event was still fresh in my mind because I was able to add a lot of detail from memory that I had not written down on the index cards. As I look back on those note cards today, over two years later, I recognize that much material would have been lost if I had waited until a later time to start writing. I trusted that my memories then, in the days immediately after the event, were reliable. In the sense that I relied on the unwritten notes in my head as well as raw fieldnote scratchings to construct the

narrative, I identified with Jackson's (1990) source who observed "I am a fieldnote" (p. 21). I wrote about my lived experience in the field, regardless of the source of data for the narrative. At that time, my memories were as accessible to write about as were the physical notes that had been produced.

First person and self disclosure

Even in the first draft of this narrative, I chose to speak in the first person and tell the story of the Luau as *my* story as well as the story of the INS partiers. Given that my beliefs are aligned with Krieger's (1991) about how it is I know, how it is I want to connect with my readers, and, additionally, my prior experience with first person narrative during many papers of self-exploration produced during my counseling degree, I found writing in this manner to be quite comfortable. I believe that writing about the other and writing about me are equivalent gestures. In this current work, I have made a commitment to revealing relevant parts of my biography, in order for readers to make up their own minds regarding the reasonableness of my interpretations. Of course, I know that this practice is not without its risks, and I have had to consider how I may handle whatever judgments might be made of me as I disclose such private part of my life as an alcoholic history and an arrest for driving under the influence. These are aspects of my past of which I am not particularly proud, though they are certainly among the most pertinent pieces of personal information to disclose as I describe and interpret the drinking behaviors of others. I eventually decided that the reader's right to know supersedes any inclination on my part to keep private such relevant information, and that there is no way I can control negative judgments of others, in any event. Furthermore, all of this basically speaks to my desire to connect with my readers, to be honest with them, and to be true to myself.

Choice of tense

Then there was the matter of what tense to write in. Should I write it in present tense, as if the Luau is happening as the readers read? Or should I narrate in past tense, as in describing a prior lived experience? The answer was not clear to me as I produced the first draft of the narrative, nor have I totally decided on the best approach yet. In an earlier draft of this paper, I offered the narrative almost totally in present tense, except for the introductory paragraph were I "arrived" (past tense) on the scene. Thereafter, I described the remainder of the evening in present tense. I thought that that approach worked fairly well. Acting on the suggestion of a reviewer, however, I have changed many of the action verbs associated with what I did to the past tense and left a number of other verbs in the present tense. The narrative now reads "this is what I experienced (past tense) and this is the way I see it (present tense)." I'm not really sure that this improved the narrative, although the more I read it over, the more I believe it flows better this way. Of course, I know there is no "right" way, only a way that works best for what I want it to do. This narrative has since been integrated into my dissertation (Arnold, forthcoming)—along with other interview data where member's experiences are described in past tense—which addresses more completely the group's alcohol use and how the socialization process teaches new members to perpetuate an addictive organization (Schaef & Fassel, 1988).

- *Interpretations and narrative flow*

The most overt of the interpretations offered in the narrative were not present in the first drafts. I later added the portions of the text that speak to fraternity members' "denial" or their attempts at "impression management." In adding these portions, I was unsure about how best to present them. Should I bring them up as they occur in the narrative, thereby (potentially) detracting from the flow of the story? Or, perhaps, should I incorporate them into a section immediately after the story, bringing the readers' attention to these matters as soon as possible without interrupting the story's natural progression?

Based on notes to myself that I had scribbled in the margins on a previous hard copy of the narrative, I began by inserting parenthetical remarks directly into the word-processed narrative. I thought that I would then have the option of eventually working them into the natural flow of the story somehow, or alternatively, cutting and pasting them into another section if I felt that I was interrupting the story too radically. The more I worked with the parenthetical remarks, the more I sensed that it was best to keep them in the body of the story, and eventually the parentheses themselves became more of a detracting force than the remarks they enclosed. For the most part, the parentheses have now been removed. Additionally, I had to make decisions about whether to make these remarks into separate paragraphs or to let them reside in the same paragraphs with the material to which they were referring. After much reworking, I decided there were no rules and used a combination of these techniques in the resulting narrative.

The inclusion of autobiography

I agree with Whyte (1981) that our "ideas grow up in part out of our immersion in the data and out of the whole process of living" (p. 280). My "process of living" has included extensive personal involvement with alcohol. I believe it would have been inherently dishonest to have produced an account of the drinking behavior of others without including some reference to my own experience. As a recovering alcoholic and one who has studied in the field of addictions, I am quite naturally attuned to the behaviors in others which are alcoholic-like. Terms and characteristics such as "denial," "control," "impression management" and so on, which appear in the Luau narrative, describe alcoholic-like behavior and are natural for me to utilize as I strive to interpret the data. These terms are part of my learned lexicon and help to frame the way I perceive, act, and react to the world. In fact, for me to remain in recovery, it is necessary for me to have an awareness of such characteristics in myself as well as in others. So, when I pick out such traits or behaviors, it is because my antennae are up to detect them. It is what and who I am and I believe that it is important for my readers to be aware of my biography in order to assist them in determining the justifiability of my interpretations and arguments.

Conclusion

Ethnographies, in conventional anthropological and sociological terms, have tended to avoid acknowledging the subjective nature of the craft and are most often written as detached, third-person accounts. Earlier I summarized some views that say, in effect, "it doesn't have to be this way." After stating that I find written work most interesting when I can vicariously experience a culture *with* the author, I then presented a tale from my

fieldwork that involves college students and alcohol use—anticipating that my audience may vicariously experience a culture with which I am familiar.

I provided, within the context of the narrative just presented, some elements of interpretation that is informed, in part, by my biography. I argue that drawing upon such autobiographical information helps to shed light on the phenomenon under investigation here—and provides a level to interpretation that may not exist (or be justifiable) without its inclusion. Of course, the interpretive components of the INS Luau narrative as presented above are tentative and unfinished, as well as my analysis of the broader culture of this group. I continue to try to understand what I've found there. Such is the nature of this game, however—frustrating though I find it. I often think the best that I can do is to remember the wisdom of Clifford Geertz (1973) when he said:

> Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is. It is a strange science whose most telling assertions are its most tremulously based, in which to get somewhere in the matter at hand is to intensify the suspicion, both your own and that of others, that you are not quite getting it right. (p. 29)

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